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A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF INGESTRE,

ON SUNDAY, JANUARY 21ST, 1849,

On occasion of the Death

OF THE

RIGHT HON^{BLE} CHARLES CHETWYND

EARL TALBOT, K.G.,

LORD LIEUTENANT OF THE COUNTY OF STAFFORD.

BY

I. W. HILLYARD, M. A.,

CURATE OF INGESTRE.

PRINTED FOR CIRCULATION AMONG THE FAMILY AND
FRIENDS OF THE DECEASED EARL,

BY R. AND W. WRIGHT, STAFFORD.

1849.

TO

CECIL CHETWYND MARCHIONESS OF LOTHIAN,

THIS SERMON,

PREACHED

ON THE DEATH OF HER BELOVED AND REVERED FATHER,

IS INSCRIBED,

WITH A FEELING OF THE DEEPEST SYMPATHY AND RESPECT.

BY

HER FAITHFUL HUMBLE SERVANT,

I. W. HILLYARD.

S E R M O N .

ISAIAH LVII. 1.

The righteous perisheth and no man layeth it to heart.

A disregard of the dealings of Providence is a fault of which many persons are guilty. Hence events the most important and instructive, pass from their minds, and leave no useful or salutary impression behind them; yet if we believe “that there verily is a God that ruleth in the earth”—“that not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our heavenly Father”—that “even the very hairs of our heads are all numbered,”—we must surely feel it to be our duty to recognize His hand in all that befalls us, and especially, to make events which affect the welfare of nations and families, the subject of frequent and devout meditation.

Now this disregard of God’s dealings in the world, is always spoken of in the Bible as a mark of impiety. “Woe unto them,” says Isaiah, “that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink, that continue unto night till wine inflame them, and the harp and the viol,

the tabret and pipe are in their feasts, but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operations of his hands. Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge ;” and again the text, “ The righteous perisheth and no man layeth it to heart.”

One of the principal marks by which the real Christian is distinguished from the mere man of the world is this,—that the former always sets God before him, trying to make out and understand his will in every thing that happens ; whereas the latter never takes any notice of events in a religious point of view, neither is God in all his thoughts. When this insensibility or inconsideration becomes general among a people, as was the case with the Jews in the time of Isaiah, we require no further proof to show us that they are fast hastening to decay and ruin. A disregard of the providential dealings of God is altogether inconsistent with that feeling of reverence for our holy religion, upon which depends the real strength of the community, and without which we cannot truly entertain any hope of the Divine favour.

Most inexcusable, therefore, shall we be, if, on reviewing the events of the year just ended, we are unmindful of that unseen Power who overrules all things, and who can, and often does, from the evil bring forth the good. The history

of the past year should teach us many a lesson of warning, of humility, of man's helplessness, of our entire dependance on Him who alone can order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men,—“that except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” But whatever may be our feelings with regard to the general dealings of Providence, that sad loss which we have so recently sustained is an event that must needs affect us all. God is at this moment speaking to us in language too plain to be misunderstood. “Hear ye the rod and who hath appointed it.”

Within a very short period this county has sustained more than one such bereavement, and our own neighbourhood in particular has been specially visited in this respect. At the beginning of the past year we had to deplore the loss of a near neighbour, a man of high rank and station, who had deserved well of the Church and nation, and who for many years held various important offices in the government of this country. And now we are called to weep at the grave of him, who was our kind friend and benefactor, the representative of his Sovereign in this county, and who regularly worshipped with us in this place.

May it please God to assist us in our meditations upon this sorrowful event. May we all

try to learn from it those lessons of heavenly wisdom which it is so well calculated to teach.

In the text the Prophet complains that good men were not duly appreciated by the Jewish nation, and that their deaths made no impression on the minds of his countrymen. "The righteous perisheth and no man layeth it to heart." The lesson we should learn from hence is, to guard against their sin, not to fall into the like condemnation.

Assuredly, my brethren, we cannot think too highly of good and faithful men. They are the stay and support of the neighbourhood in which they live. They are the persons under God to whom we look up, and in whom we confide in times of difficulty; and their value becomes still more apparent when they are placed in situations of authority and responsibility, when they have to perform the duties of rulers or magistrates at a period when iniquity abounds, and the overflowings of ungodliness make us afraid. Then it is that the value of their excellent qualities is more especially felt; and this partly from the effect of their good example on the character and conduct of others, in abashing the vicious and encouraging the well-disposed; and partly from the hope we cherish that for the sake of such persons, it may please God to avert or suspend those judgments which might otherwise be in-

flicted on a disobedient and gainsaying people. They may prevail with God to exercise long-suffering and forbearance. They may stay the hand of uplifted justice, and thus be made instrumental, in a way little thought of by many, to the welfare of all.

How truly these remarks apply to him, whose decease we are now lamenting, you will none of you be at a loss to perceive. A good and faithful man has been removed from among us, one whose character will bear the closest examination. Those of you who have been accustomed to worship God in this church, can bear witness to the genuine piety, the strong devotional feelings of his mind, manifested in his habitual attendance on the public services of religion,—in his regular participation of the holy Communion, and in the lowliness and reverence with which he approached the Table of the Lord. Nor can you, I am sure, soon forget the solemn and impressive manner in which he was accustomed to repeat aloud, the responses of our beautiful Liturgy. As a proof that these indications of piety were not merely assumed, we find him carrying them with him into his daily occupations and concerns. His kindness towards others, his tender consideration for the feelings of others, the sympathy he always evinced for those in affliction and distress, are among some of the proofs that he was a Christian not in name only, but in deed and in truth.

Further. Those who have felt the blessings of religion themselves are ever most anxious to impart them to others. And who so forward as our departed brother in works of this kind? Who so anxious to promote the interests of true religion and to benefit the souls of his fellow men? He thought no sacrifice too great; he spared not himself nor his substance provided he could accomplish this object; and two beautiful Churches, the one in the hamlet of Salt, and the other at Hixon, will be lasting monuments of his piety as well as of his munificence. For though others contributed towards their erection, yet with him they originated, and upon him fell the great burden of the cost. He had for several years past felt the necessity of doing something for the religious instruction of the inhabitants of those places, spiritually destitute as they were, and it was, I know, before his death a source of gratification to him, that it had pleased God to spare his life to see the desire of his heart accomplished. May the inhabitants of those two hamlets show their sense of his goodness towards them, by carefully availing themselves of the means of grace which he has placed within their reach, that so all may manifest the blessed fruits of our holy religion in their daily life and conversation.

Another striking feature in the character of our departed brother, was his great benevolence.

He was emphatically the friend of the poor man. For more than ten years I have at times been in the habit of bringing cases of distress before him. A poor man had sustained a loss, or been overtaken by sickness, or was in trouble of some kind. Never did I state such a case to him without obtaining all, and more than all, I asked. Nor shall I soon forget, when at the beginning of last year the fever broke out among the poor in the Union Workhouse, the anxiety he evinced on that occasion, nor the trouble he took to arrest its progress. He did not rest satisfied with simply giving orders to that effect, but he actually visited the Union three times in the course of a week, to see that his orders had been executed, and that too at a time when some were afraid to go near, on account of the infection.

It was in this way, by his daily life and conduct, that he gave the most satisfactory proofs of the living power of those Christian principles which he professed. Many of his works of love and mercy are known to you all; but many others are known to God alone, and will appear only in that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. In short, as a Father, as a Magistrate, as a Landlord, as a Master, as a Neighbour, as a Friend,—in all these relations,—where shall we find any who surpassed him?

A circumstance also which tends much to aggravate our loss is this, that he spent the whole of his time among us. His was not a passing sojourn of two or three months in the course of the year, but he lived and dwelt among us, and was one of us. He was always planning, always devising something to give employment to the poor, something for their benefit. At all seasons of the year,—in summer and winter, in seed-time and harvest, wherever the labourers were at work, how frequently would you see him among them, with a kind word, a word of encouragement for every body. He has left so many tokens of himself on this estate, that we who live here can surely never forget him. Land that was once unproductive now rendered most fertile; the hill that was once barren now covered with trees; the roads, the bridges, the buildings, the gardens, are all so many memorials of him. We can, in fact, move in no direction without meeting with traces of him. But why should I thus speak? He needs no praise of mine; you know all these things better than I do. If ever any man spent his life and his substance in doing good, he was the man. If ever any man deserved well of his country, it was our departed brother. His was a rare assemblage of those virtues which constitute a good citizen. And yet if there was one trait in his

character which shone forth more conspicuously than another during his illness, it was the humility with which he spoke of himself and his doings. His good deeds (and how many were they!) he would not hear mentioned. "I can claim no merit for them. I am a sinner. All I can do is to throw myself upon the mercy of God through Jesus Christ, and hope for pardon." Such was his language. Words well worthy our most serious consideration!

That you do all feel his loss, I doubt not. That you are all most anxious to pay every tribute of respect to his memory, I feel assured. But the great practical question I wish to impress upon your minds is this,—do you lay the event to heart in the sense meant by the Prophet in the words of the text? The best way in which you can do so,—the very best way in which you can show your respect for his memory,—is by following his example. You may imitate the pattern of his virtues,—you may be attentive to your religious duties,—you may be regular in your participation of the Holy Communion as he was,—you may have family prayers in your homes as he had,—you may try to do all the good in your power as he did,—you may be kindly affectioned one towards another. In a word, I will give you the advice which he himself if he were present would give you, try to become good Christians.

And those of you here who are conscious that you have hitherto led a careless or an ungodly life,—those of you who have hitherto felt little or no solicitude for your never-dying souls,—to such I would say, now is a good time for beginning the work of religion in earnest. There cannot be a more fitting season than when we are standing as it were over the grave of one so loved, so respected, for making good resolutions and purposes of amendment,—for laying the event to heart in the full sense of the words. Say to yourselves, I have lost a good friend : I have lost a good landlord : I have lost a good master : God grant that I may lay it to heart. May it be the means of stirring me up, and making me a better man, more devout, more holy, more prepared for that change which soon, ah very soon, awaits myself. If you will each of you put up such a prayer as this to the throne of grace in earnestness and sincerity, that prayer shall be answered, for the promise is, “ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find.”

But there is another consideration connected with the subject before us to which I will briefly call your attention.

He whose loss we now deplore was accustomed to take the lead in all matters affecting the interests of this neighbourhood. Any scheme of benevolence, any plan to improve the morals, or

to promote the cause of religion among the people, always received his best consideration; and if there were any reasonable grounds of its being successful, received also his warmest support. He was the head in fact to whom we looked up for counsel; whose age, whose experience, whose good sense, and whose position as the first magistrate in the county, gave us the greatest confidence in him. A feeling of despondency is apt to come over us on the loss of such a friend. But when good and faithful men are removed, we must recollect that there is the more to be done by the survivors. Nor must we overlook the dangers to which such an event exposes us, but try to guard against them. The enemy, who is always on the watch to sow tares among the wheat, will, I doubt not, take advantage of our loss, and try to sow differences and dissensions among ourselves. He will try to pervert and mar everything that tends to good, to promote everything that has a tendency to evil. If there is one lesson more than another which this event should teach us, it is this—that we should all, if possible, be more united. Union is strength. And in these times all good people must be united. The cause of God and of his Church demands all our collective strength. We have lost a valuable coadjutor, let us recollect that so much additional work is thrown upon ourselves;—let us then allow nothing to interfere

with our duty in this respect,—no root of bitterness,—no mistrust one of another,—but let all differences of every kind be merged in the blessed purpose of determining to serve God and his cause in this our day and generation. May it have the effect of causing us one and all to love each other more tenderly, and to try to help each other forward in the right way that leadeth to life everlasting. We are but strangers and pilgrims upon earth. Here we have no continuing city. We are, or we ought to be, seeking a better country, even a heavenly. As fellow-travellers, then, we should try to help each other forward on the road. Many difficulties, many dangers, many trials await us in the course of our pilgrimage. Let us all endeavour as much as possible to bear each other's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

It is in this way I wish you to improve the sad event. Endeavour to recognize the hand of Providence, and try to learn what God is teaching you. Try to follow the good example that our departed brother has left behind him. And try and pray more especially that it may have the effect of drawing us all closer together in the bonds of a holy love and brotherhood. For in the words of our blessed Lord and Master, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

But I cannot conclude without offering you a few words in the way of consolation. When it is said in my text, "The righteous perish," of course no more is meant than that they disappear from this earthly scene. Their bodies are indeed committed to the ground, "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." But it is in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ. What then shall I say to you? wherewith shall I comfort you? It must be derived from this source,—the declaration of God's most holy word. The dissolving of the union between near relations, the breaking up of long and intimate connexions, are matters, I know, that must needs affect us. That Providence which at one stroke separates between a father and his children, between a good master and his servants, and which removes one so greatly beloved from all his connexions, cannot do otherwise than make us feel. Indeed we are allowed to feel on such occasions in moderation. At the grave of Lazarus our blessed Lord himself wept. But should we exceed the bounds of moderation, should our mourning under the hand of God border upon murmuring, or thinking hard of it, then are we not humbling ourselves on account of it, nor laying the event to heart in the way which God intended. There are however many considerations which might be urged to alleviate

our grief, so many indeed that under the heaviest affliction of the present state, we may well weep as though we wept not.

In this instance, we may not only comfort ourselves with the consideration that it is the common lot of man, and that our departed brother had attained the age allotted to man, viz., three-score years and ten, but what is a much stronger ground of consolation, we may comfort ourselves with the hope that it is a real and substantial advantage to him. If I may so speak, there is a pleasure even in the very pain we feel for those who die in the Lord. Our blessed Redeemer has walked the road before us, and by so doing has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. When the sting of death is removed, there remains little else but the name, the shadow of death to encounter, and the prospect of a glorious resurrection more than does away with even that. Your father, your friend, your benefactor, your master, is not dead but sleepeth, and his Redeemer ere long will come that he may awake him out of his sleep.

Nor is this all. May we not comfort ourselves with the hope that he lives already among the spirits of the just made perfect? Though the earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, yet the inhabitant is not turned out, as it were, naked and destitute, but has a house not made with

hands, eternal in the heavens. This it was which reduced the Apostle to “a strait betwixt two,” having a desire on the one hand to be profitable to the Church, and on the other to depart and be with Christ, which, as far as he himself was concerned, was far better. If we could live more by faith and less by sight; if we could look more at the things unseen and less at the things which are seen; what our Lord said to his disciples might, I believe, be said by every dying Christian to his surviving friends, “If ye loved me ye would rejoice, because I said I go unto the Father,”—and what was the reason he assigned?—“For my Father is greater than I,”—that is, the glory and happiness which my Father possesses, and which I go to possess, are greater than anything I can enjoy here. Let us, my brethren, comfort ourselves with thoughts like these, ever recollecting that the separation will be but a very short one, and that we shall all soon be called to follow him. Knowing then these things, let us try to lay the event to heart in the right way; let us all endeavour to turn it to account, for our own spiritual benefit, that when it pleases God to summon us hence, we may be prepared for that solemn event. In a word, let none of us here present leave the Church, without putting up this prayer to Almighty God, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.”

R. AND W. WRIGHT, PRINTERS, STAFFORD.



